MY RAILROAD ADVENTURE IN MEXICO

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Never send a boy to do a man's job. That's why over 19,000 Shriners from Pittsburgh to Dallas asked the railroads to move them and their baggage to Miami

Only the railroads could have done it

BY CHARLES LAYNG

ON 52 SPECIAL TRAINS more than 19,000 Shriners and their families rode into Miami, Fla., for their convention in June 1952. Along with them came more than 300 horses and mules, several hundred bass drums, quite a few miniature locomotives, trick automobiles, floats and all the other colorful paraphernalia that helps to make a Shrine convention and its parade such an outstanding spectacle.

An equally delightful spectacle from a railroader's point of view was the smooth way in which the Florida East Coast and the Seaboard Air Line handled this deluge of red-fezzed passengers.

This was the largest convention ever held in Miami and by far the largest concentrated passenger movement into and out of that city. It was this concentration rather than the huge number of passengers handled that caused the principal headaches. On June 15, for example, 26 special trains came rolling into Miami from the north; they were followed by 26 more on June 16. Thirty-nine specials left Miami for the north on June 20 and 11 more followed on the next day; the remainder left a day or two later. The movement of that many trains in such a short period was accomplished with what seems to be almost miraculous on-time percentage — not only with regard to the specials but for the regular passenger and freight trains as well. Fortunately, in the latter respect the heavy seasonal movement of perishables north from Miami had just about ceased before the Shriners invaded the city.

"SANDY" MEARES, a veteran Seaboard conductor who captains the *Silver Star*, shook his head when I asked him how conditions were up the road the day he took a regular northbound train and bucked that flood of southbound specials on the single-track Seaboard.

"Never saw anything like it," Sandy told me. "I went north on No. 22 that day and we met ten trains between here and West Lake Wales [203 miles]. They mainlined the specials and we took siding for them, but we were only 12 minutes late out of West Lake Wales — and we made that up before we got to Jacksonville. That traffic control sure let us slide by that slew of trains slick as a whistle."

Of course, in addition to the flood of special trains there were numerous special-car movements of Shriners on regular trains as well as smaller groups and individuals riding these trains. The specials alone brought nearly 1000 cars into Miami in two days — from Minneapolis and from Indianapolis; from Boston and from Dallas; from Cleveland and from Wilkes-Barre; from Pittsburgh, Pa., and from Pittsburg, Kans.

It was a beautiful demonstration of the fact that the railways are supreme in mass transportation. Obviously, though, a gigantic movement such as this was not just handled "off the cuff." Meetings were held weeks in advance of the time when the first special rolled in. The foreign lines on which the trains originated were asked to give the cars to be used in the movement a special going-over so that they would be in first-class shape when they arrived and take that much load off the shoulders of the Miami car forces. In many cases the foreign lines were also asked to send their diners and dining-car crews through to Miami. Some of the specials came in with 500 passengers aboard and nearly all of these trains carried two diners.

As more and more temples signed up for special trains the operating officers consulted with the dispatchers as to ways and means of getting the specials over the road without interference with each other or with regular trains. Since they were all due to arrive in Miami within two days this took quite a bit of figuring. The Seaboard was able to route a few of its trains via a junction called Baldwin just outside of Jacksonville, but nearly all of the trains of both roads had to come through Jacksonville and plans had to be made at that already busy terminal to take care of the extra load without congestion.

One of the biggest problems after the specials had arrived in Miami was getting the Shriners and their baggage from the trains to their respective hotels; the railways undertook to supervise this. The biggest percentage of the visiting nobles stayed in the hotels of Miami Beach, the island city out in Biscayne Bay which is not directly served by any railway. The hotels on the north beach are anywhere from five to eight miles from the downtown Miami railway stations, and — winter or summer — the normal street traffic of that city is highly congested. Every available bus in town was pooled to handle the visiting Shriners and every available truck was in a similar pool to handle their baggage. In order to cut down the hauls through the heavy downtown traffic, half of the Seaboard specials and many of the FEC trains were unloaded at points in Miami some miles north of the passenger stations so that the north-beach hotels might be reached via the 79th Street Causeway and less busy suburban streets. The Seaboard built temporary facilities for this purpose in its spacious new coach and freight yard, opened only last summer in Hialeah, and the FEC used an existing passenger platform at 71st Street.

ON the morning of June 15 I met three of the Seaboard specials at Hialeah; all were carrying nobles from the Medinah Temple in Chicago. W. J. Ficht, the Seaboard's genial general passenger agent at Miami, was in charge of the unloading detail. He's a fisherman of considerable note, and in handling the complicated business he displayed all the patience and skill which I've seen him use in boating a 30-pound snook.

"Our job is made a lot easier by the fact that each special has a transportation representative of the temple on board," he told me. "All of them are experienced. This will be the thirty-second pilgrimage that one of them has handled."

He explained to me that these fellows keep all the tickets for the en-

Travel by Train

Tired homebound Shriners tumbled from train-side buses into specials, pronouncing Miami and its railroads perfect convention hosts.

Twenty-six special trains rolled Shriners into Miami on the first day of their 1952 convention. This was chaos with a careful system.

tire train together; the train conductors merely collect the travel coupons from the individual passengers and pick up the tickets themselves from the transportation representative. It sounds simple enough, but I'll bet that passenger-accounting people are even yet sweating blood over the figuring that went on after the movement to get the proper apportionment of the revenue into the coffers of each participating line.

There were 250 nobles on the Medinah special that pulled in at 9:45 a. m. They were all going to the same hotel in Miami Beach, which simplified matters somewhat, and they were soon shepherded aboard a fleet of buses and on their way, with their baggage following them on a fleet of trucks. This shuttling required good dispatching. The railways gave the truck and bus people advance notice as to the very minute the trains would pull in; as the day wore on and more and more specials arrived, the buses and trucks were pulling up at the stations just a few minutes before the trains arrived.

The second Medinah train brought in 250 more nobles at 10:30 a. m.; all of these were also going to the same hotel and were loaded on buses and trucks in an incredibly short space of time. The specials were really beginning to roll in now. The third special from Medinah offered more of a problem, since its 250 passengers were going to four different hotels. The scene was reminiscent of the old days when hotel hacks swarmed around railway stations, with the runners shouting the merits of their respective hostelries; but this was highly organized confusion. The train passengers milled around all right, but the Seaboard passenger men and the temple's own train representative unsnarled the tangle as if by magic. As far as I could see, in a few minutes every Shriner had been herded aboard the proper bus while the baggage men were busy getting the luggage sorted out and loaded on the right trucks. When they had gone, Ficht wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"What happens if a Shriner gets on the wrong bus or his bags on the wrong truck?" I asked him.

"It couldn't possibly happen," he assured me solemnly. Then he grinned. "Actually I don't think it did happen, but even if it did it wouldn't matter too much in this particular case. All of the four hotels to which this bunch is going are within three blocks of one another, so we could straighten things out easily enough. But we've got another bunch coming in at the downtown station in about an hour. Part of them are staying at a Miami hotel and another part at the Beach, five miles away. If we mix *them* up — that *would* be something."

I made a check with the temple transportation representatives later, and I couldn't find a single instance in which any of the 20,000 Shriners got on the wrong bus or had any of their luggage lost.

After watching the Medinah trains come in at Hialeah I hustled downtown to watch one Dayton and two Indianapolis specials come in at the FEC station. The Indianapolis specials had stopped at St. Augustine for sightseeing for some hours; the Dayton special had stopped there to permit the nobles to visit Marineland while the equipment was deadheaded on south to Daytona Beach, where the Shriners reboarded it. Despite these dispatching problems, all three specials rolled into the downtown station right on the dot, 15 and 30 minutes apart respectively. There I saw Clarence Beals, chief operating officer of the Florida East Coast — in the thick of things as usual. He used to be terminal trainmaster on the Illinois Central at Chicago many years ago.

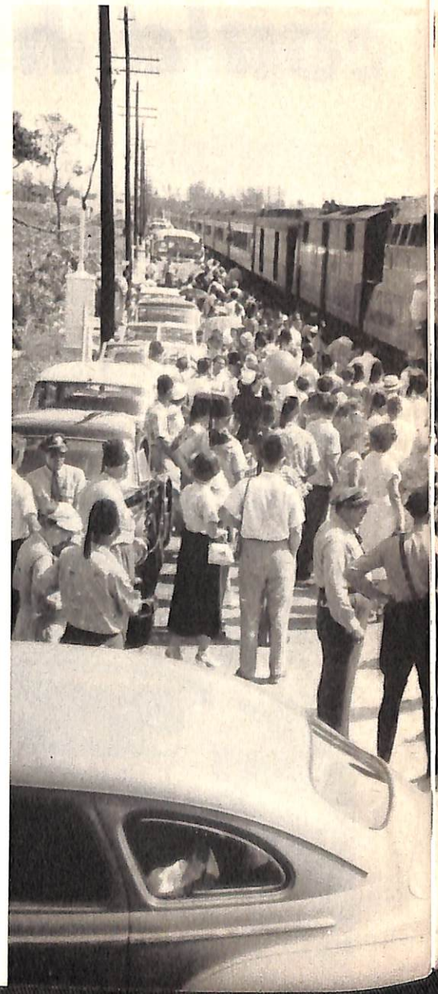
"Reminds me of the suburban rush hour at Van Buren Street," he commented. "Only much more so."

The first special had a baggage car and two horse cars on the head end; the second had two baggage cars; and the third, two baggage cars and a horse car. While the Shriners and their baggage cars were being loaded into buses and trucks the head-end equipment was switched out and taken to the freight station, where the large band instruments, trick autos, and so forth were unloaded.

The horses were also unloaded there. Some 300 horses and mules came in on the specials for use in the mounted sections of the parade. They were stabled and fed beneath the stands in the Orange Bowl stadium, some 25 blocks from each of the stations where they were unloaded. They were led through the streets for that distance under police escort, since they had to travel over streets that are normally full of automobile traffic. A Missouri temple brought in a carload of that state's famous mules and after the parade sold all but one of them to Miami dealers. The mule owners failed to notify either the railway or the police department of the sale, and a formidable motorcycle escort showed up at the stadium to escort the mules back to the train. They were greeted by one flea-bitten mule too old and spavined to be sold. The escort, however, was equal to the occasion and solemnly guided that one mule for 25 blocks through downtown Miami and loaded him aboard the horse car that had brought him and his mates. He made the journey home in solitary grandeur.

After several of the specials had rolled in that first day both the Seaboard and the FEC started a few of the weirdest trains ever seen northbound. Because of the large amounts of motive power and manpower required to operate so many specials in two days, men and diesels were deadheaded back to Jacksonville to handle the second day's rush. One FEC train I saw going north consisted of eight diesel locomotive units, one sleeping car and two baggage cars, and the Seaboard ran similar trains. One of

Passengers billeted in the North Miami Beach hotels were dropped off at Military Junction, a 71st Street stop, by the Florida East Coast.



Only a man with a steady hand can smile when a chunk of ice comes at him. He'll drop it into the bunkers of an outgoing Seaboard diner.

F. Hale.

the regular northbound trains on that road the same day had five diesel units at the head end.

All day Sunday and Monday the specials rolled in and I shuttled from station to station watching the smooth and rapid unloading. It wasn't until Tuesday morning that I had time to investigate where and how this bewildering array of equipment was parked. This was the job — along with a thousand other jobs — of the Miami operating department heads: Munn Norwood, terminal superintendent of the FEC, and Clarence Meares, terminal trainmaster of the Seaboard. The former used to run an engine; the latter was once a conductor. But they have several things in common. Both are old-timers in Florida railroading; both keep their heads no matter what the emergency; and both have been stationed in Miami for some years, which means that emergency movements have become practically routine with them although neither of them was ever before called upon to handle a mass movement such as this.

"One thing that helped in getting the trains over the road," Munn told me, "was the fact that most of our freight men have had a lot of passenger-train experience. During the winter season we run a lot more passenger trains than in the summer, so we had a reservoir of experienced men available. The boys did a fine job."

The Seaboard had room to store all the cars that came in on the specials at its new Hialeah yard. Half of the specials terminated there and the other half were doubled back to this yard for temporary storage as soon as the passengers and baggage had left. The Florida East Coast has a double-track belt line around Miami with numerous crossovers. During the perishable shipping season this is an extremely busy piece of railroad, but in June it was possible to allocate one of the double tracks for the exclusive purpose of storing Shrine specials. Both lines worked up an accurate system of blueprints showing exactly where each piece of equipment was stored and the augmented car-department forces went right to work cleaning and servicing the cars for the return movement.

I spent two days wandering around the yards looking at what was possibly the largest group of foreign-line passenger cars ever assembled at one place. Southeastern lines were the most heavily represented, of course, but that was only the beginning. In addition to numerous Seaboard and FEC diners, Atlantic Coast Line, Louisville & Nashville, Southern, Illinois Central, Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac and many others had their quota.

There were Pullmans everywhere and coaches, tavern cars, recreation cars, dormitory cars and horse cars. The Atlanta and St. Petersburg specials were solid coach trains. Even in the days of mass troop movements during World War II one seldom saw such a congregation of maverick cars.

Back in 1928 there was a Shrine convention in Miami — nowhere as big as this one of course. At that time the Shriners slept in parked Pullmans because they couldn't be accommodated in Miami's hotels. Several hundred hotels where the nobles could be adequately housed have been built in the interim. Miami Beach alone has almost 400 hotels. It was necessary in 1952, however, to house the foreign-line dining-car crews and a considerable number of the sleeper, tavern and lounge porters and waiters in railway equipment. Dormitory cars of foreign lines had come in on some of the specials and these were augmented by those belonging to the local lines. A not-too-miniature dormitory-car city was set up on both the Seaboard and the FEC.

F. Hale.

THE BIG PARADE, the finale of all convention activities, took place on Thursday and was not over until after midnight. The first special was due to leave Miami at 3 a. m. on Friday. Parade equipment was hustled to the waiting baggage cars as soon as it had completed its tour. I have never seen so many drum and tuba cases in one place as we hustled through downtown Miami in the wee hours of that Friday morning. The baggage cars were being loaded with the bulky equipment, and the horses were being led through the streets to the horse cars. Waiting switch engines, with their movements timed almost to the split second, hooked onto the head-end cars as soon as they had been loaded, and hustled them across town to where the specials were waiting.

Getting 38 specials out of Miami between 8 a. m. and 11:59 p. m. on June 20 was not a job to be sneezed at, particularly since there were eight regular passenger trains in each direction, as well as several freight trains to be moved during the same hours. Every train but two departed right on time. Cars on these two trains developed

"Will this go next to that tuba?" Baggage loading of the Shriners' paraphernalia was more like working an impossible jigsaw puzzle.

F. Hale.

This Florida East Coast line-up was more than devoured by 15 outgoing specials in two hours the day after the convention ended in Miami.

electrical failures — one two minutes in advance of leaving time, the other six minutes before — but they did get out of town less than a half hour late and arrived at Jacksonville just a few minutes behind time.

Not one of the 20,000 Shriners and their families were left behind or got on the wrong train, although I saw one noble bewailing bitterly that he had somehow lost his wife. He found her quietly reading a magazine in their compartment when he got to the train. No one was injured on railway property during the process of rapid loading and unloading, nor did any of the horses stray. Each miniature locomotive, each trick automobile, each float and each bass drum got back into the proper baggage car and the mountains of hand luggage were all delivered to the proper cars from the hotels.

Any man who has stood around first on one foot and then on the other while waiting for his wife to get ready as the precious minutes before train time slip by will sympathize with Messrs. Jeffries and Ficht who were faced with the problem of getting thousands of wives ready on time. Not only that, but the hand luggage had to be packed and ready in good season so that the trucks could have it at the train for sorting. Most of the sorting was done at the hotels so as to lessen the confusion at trainside, where large numbers of extra baggage porters were busily transporting the luggage from the trucks to the railroad cars.

"Thank God it didn't rain," both Jeffries and Ficht sighed. Although they had allowed for this contingency in their planning, a tropical downpour such as frequently hits Miami at this season might have quickly rusted any part of the well-oiled machinery.

A few groups of Shriners came into Miami in a bedraggled mass by bus, still fewer by air. The latter were handicapped by octane gas rationing. Several such groups expressed their intentions to "use the train next time." The 19,000 or so who were foresighted enough to use the train expressed their complete satisfaction not only with the FEC and the Seaboard but with Miami as a convention city.

Diesels and crews were deadheaded to Jacksonville in almost solid trains of motive power to do double duty for the second day's haul.

F. Hale